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February 20, 1990

## UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON LATIN AMERICAN EXPERT TO OBSERVE NICARAGUAN ELECTIONS

The aftermath of the Feb. 25 presidential elections in Nicaragua may mark a period of national reconciliation as well as a turning point for the war in El Salvador, predicts Mark Ensalamo, an assistant professor of political science at the University of Dayton who will travel to Nicaragua Friday, Feb. 23 to observe the elections first-hand.

With credentials from the Nicaraguan Supreme Electoral Council, Ensalamo, traveling under the aegis of the Casa Nicaraguense de Espanol (CNE), will spend a week living with a pro-Sandinista Nicaraguan family and recording their reactions to the political events, said Marcia Santos, program director of CNE. Ensalamo also will interview political party members, attend National Assembly sessions and observe voting patterns.

Ensalamo said there appears to be solid support among the young and within the military for President Daniel Ortega of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN), while business leaders back presidential candidate Violeta Barrios de Chamorro from the 14-party National Opposition Union (UNO). As many as 40 percent of the Nicaraguan voting population is undecided.

Both Sandinista and opposition leaders have committed to abide by the results of the election. "I think these will be free elections," Ensalamo said. "Some of the criticisms voiced by the State Department and independent observers are worth considering. But the State Department and the Bush administration have subtly campaigned to discredit the elections, so they won't have to live with a Sandinista victory."

Ensalamo is hopeful that the elections will be followed by a period of peace and attempts to rebuild the Nicaraguan economy, which over the last 10 years has declined by half and been marked by raging inflation.

"Whatever happens in the post-election period in Nicaragua, it will affect the war in El Salvador," Ensalamo predicted. "I'm convinced that the FMLN (the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front opposing the U.S.-backed government in El Salvador) will win. Today the FMLN is what Solidarity was in Poland in 1981 -- the eventual victor."

For media interviews, contact Mark Ensalamo in Dayton at (513) 229-2595. Messages may be left for him Feb. 23-28 at the CNE in Nicaragua by dialing 011505270705. Marcia Santos can be reached at (213) 653-4702. Ensalamo will return to Dayton March 2.



*The University of Dayton*

For further information or assistance in scheduling interviews, contact Office of Public Relations, (513) 229-3241.